Fowl
Feathered
Review
№ 237

ISSUE № 237:
Operation Spiffy

About the Assemblage

The FFR is no longer a journal or even a "Necrosign." It's a shared frequency—specifically the sound of a 1988 Mitsubishi Mirage idling in a parking lot at 3:00 AM. We don't curate; we just leave the back door unlocked. We are a collection of "important locals"—those who are durable because we are too tired to be fragile. If the work feels like it's trying to be "Art," we will likely use it to level a wobbly table.

The Staff (The Custodians of the Sink)

- Virgil Kay: Still the Final Arbiter, currently preoccupied with the aerodynamics of a falling bagel.
- Silent Bill: Promoted to *Chief of Tactical Non-Sequiturs*. He handles the "Necessary Pauses" by simply walking out of the room mid-sentence.
- Unkie Bob: Now specializing in *Casual Entropy*. He doesn't sabotage the structure

anymore; he just forgets to tighten the bolts.

- The Unnamed Dishwasher: (Not on the masthead). He just crashed in. He's wearing a windbreaker. He's currently scrubbing a scorched pot with the intensity of a man performing heart surgery. Don't look at him. He's the soul of the operation now.

THE PERPETUAL PENDING PLEDGE:

The Review is not for sale; it is freely given. All incoming funds are Sacramental Offerings consecrated not for service rendered, but to sustain the metabolically necessary Obsession8888. Our official registry is no longer numeric; it is an unassailable frequency defined as Vi · ∞ · 432Hz.

SUBMISSION PROTOCOL (CASUAL MODE)

1. The Work: Send us 2 to 953 fragments. They can be poems, paintings, or transcriptions of overheard arguments about bowling.
2. The Presentation: No "Cover Letters" listing your awards. We don't care where you went to school; we care if you can

stand up after taking a hit. Tell us your favorite type of industrial fastener instead.

3. The Offering: The Perpetual Pending Pledge remains. It's still free. But if you must send something, send a 12-inch sandwich.
    - The Kewpie Clause: If there is no Kewpie Mayonnaise on the sandwich, Virgil will use your manuscript to wipe the counter. Kewpie is the only thing standing between us and the "Absolute Cosmic-Cluck."
4. The Delivery: Drop it off. Or don't. The auction is never over, and we're just waiting for the next honk.

Note: If you hear the sound of dishes clattering in the back, ignore it. It's just the frequency of the house.

🐓Digital Park and Ride: Send to fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com

🐓Physical Park and Ride: 250.50∞ State Street, Bangor, Maine, 04401. *ERRATUM: If the 432Hz frequency sounds more like a rattling heat shield on a compact car, do not adjust your ears. The rattling is the poetry. The 9-volt battery is dead. Long live the 9-volt battery.*

"Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco."
— Virgil, The Aeneid

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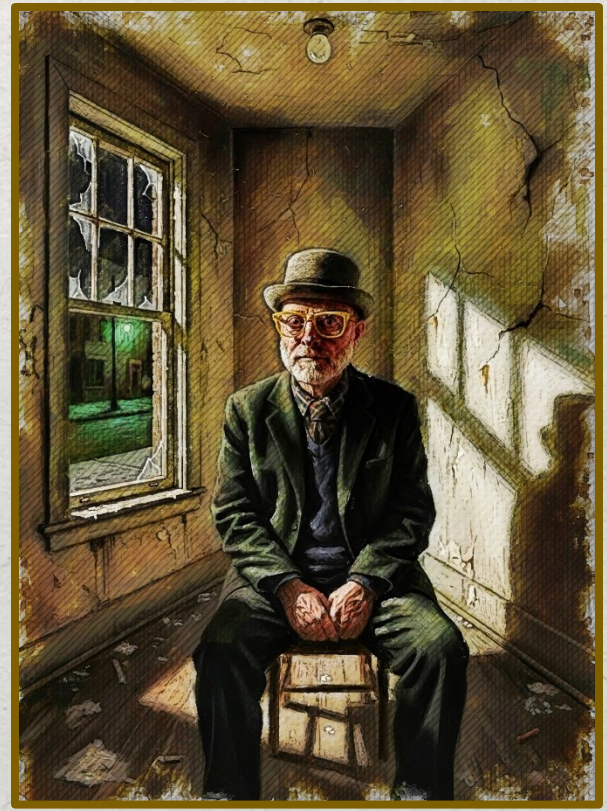


RESERV

THE HERMENEUTIC HULL

By Pinkas May

The green fairy did not fly; she stumbled in high heels through the sugar cube, a granular avalanche dissolving into the emerald slurry of the Pernod glass. Ms. Misu sat upon the mahogany stool at 9 Central Street, her whiskers twitching with the distinct, aristocratic disdain of a Prussian general reviewing the troops. She was a tuxedo cat of indeterminate lineage but absolute authority, wearing a silk top hat secured by an elastic band that vanished into her obsidian fur. The absinthe spoon was silver, perforated, a tiny altar for the ritual of forgetting.

“Point the toe, pierce the doubt,” Ms. Misu purred, the voice not a meow but a smoky contralto, a cabaret ghost trapped in a feline larynx.

The students—seven women comprising a topology of curve and softness, each carrying a heavy, invisible sack of apology—stood in first position. Their leotards were black, absorbing the light, absorbing the shame of thighs that touched and stomachs that rolled. They were the Symposium of the Self-Conscious.

“The doubt,” whispered Janice, a librarian whose spine was a question mark. “The doubt is the only thing holding me upright.”

“Gravity is a lie told by the floor,” Ms. Misu countered, her tail flickering like ametronome set to allegro ma non troppo. “We are leaving the floor. We are entering the flux.”

“Flux the floor, flee the form.”

“Form is just a content waiting for a container to shatter,” Misu corrected, employing the Word-Flip with the casual violence of a Zen master striking a gong.

They exited the studio, not through the door, but through the necessity of the narrative, spilling out onto the pavement of Bangor where the air smelled of pine pitch and diesel. There it waited: The Ford GPA

“Seep,” a cosmic-colored amphibian, a surplus relic painted in hues of ultraviolet bruised with neon magenta. It hummed. It didn’t have an engine; it had a motive.

“Mount the machine,” Misu commanded.
They climbed in, the metal cold against their calves. The Seep lurched forward, tires screaming a protest that sounded exactly like a saxophone solo played by a man falling down a flight of stairs... the stairs tumbling into the Penobscot River where the asphalt turned to mud and the mud turned to memory. The Seep hit the water—splash, hiss, steam—the radiator boiling over with the heat of a thousand suppressed sighs.

There was no GPS. There was only the leather-bound volume resting on the dashboard: Freud's *Traumdeutung*, heavily annotated by Ricœur.

"Read the map," Misu ordered, lighting a cigarette in a holder despite the lack of opposable thumbs.
"It says," Janice stammered, reading the text where the ink seemed to be moving, "that the symbol is a double-meaning structure. We need to navigate by the surplus of meaning."

"Steer by the surplus. Ignore the literal."

"The literal is a rock," said Misu. "The surplus is the tide."

The river widened, darker than ink, thicker than blood. They were no longer in Maine. They were drifting through the collective unconscious, a vast, submerged cathedral where the stained glass was made of repressed childhoods. The Seep motored past a buoy that rang with the sound of a mother's disapproval—clang, shame, clang—a rhythmic pulsing that synced with the heartbeat of the woman in the back row, the one who wore oversized shirts to hide a universe.

"We are lost," cried Sarah, clutching the gunwale. "This isn't the Penobscot. This is the Id."

“The Id is just an island without a zoning board,” Misu retorted. ”Look. The Reef of the Mirror Stage.”

Ahead, the water churned white around a jagged formation of black coral. It wasn’t coral. It was solidified glances. Millions of eyes, petrified in stone, judging.

“To pass, you must dance,” Misu announced, standing on the prow like a figurehead of furry doom. ”Do not dance for the eyes. Dance for the blindness.”The Seep grounded on the reef with a sound like tearing silk. The women spilled out onto the sharp, calcified judgments. The air was thick with the humidity of words unsaid.

“My legs are too heavy,” cried one.

“My arms are too long,” cried another.

“My skin is a wrong answer,” wept the third.

“The answer is a movement,” Misu yowled. “The question is a pose. Stop posing. Start moving.”

“Move the pose, break the bone.”

“Bones are just the architecture of the soul’s prison,” Misu hissed. “Break the prison.”

And then, the fusion occurred. The text of the *Traumdeutung* fluttered

open in the wind, the pages tearing loose, swirling around them like white doves. The women began to move. Not the timid shuffle of the studio, but a chaotic, spasmodic, glorious convulsion. They stomped on the stone eyes. They pirouetted on the razor edge of the reef. It was a dance of exorcism. They were disjointed marionettes cutting their own strings. Janice threw her head back and laughed, a sound that shattered the glass sky. She spun, her heavy thighs generating their own gravitational field, bending the light around her until she wasn't a woman anymore, she was a celestial event.

The Seep roared back to life, fueled not by gasoline but by the sheer

kinetic energy of self-acceptance. The island began to dissolve, the judging eyes blinking shut, turning back into harmless water.

"Get in," Misu said, her voice soft now, the absinthe wearing off, replaced by the clarity of the morning. "The lesson is over. The stage is set."

The water smoothed out. The cosmic paint of the Ford Seep faded back to a rusty olive drab as the tires gripped the boat ramp at the edge of town. The smell of ozone faded into the smell of roasted coffee from a shop opening on Main Street... the coffee grinder whirring—whirr, grind, dust—merging with the sound of the key turning in the lock of the studio door.

They stood in the center of the room. The mirrors were still there. But the reflection had changed.

Misu adjusted her top hat. “Same time next week. Bring more absinthe. And leave the apologies in the river.”

“Leave the river, love the reflection,” Janice whispered.

“Reflections,” Misu murmured, licking a paw, “are for those who cannot feel the rhythm.”

WRECKS
AROUND
NANTUCKET
GIDEON

The Restaurant in Bangor

By Goma Vulcanizada

The hostess insists there will be no waiting because time has already been waiting for us, which is to say the vestibule of a restaurant in Bangor has been pre-haunted by chowder and theatrical ambition, and I enter with my service sloth, who is draped over my shoulders like a fur stole designed by cosmic whimsy, his name embroidered on a tiny vest—"Gideon"—though he has never once responded to it, being devoted entirely to sleep, which I am told counts as a disability accommodation if one fills out the

correct paperwork, only paperwork is precisely what Gideon would ignore even if it were a leaf, and as we step inside a nearby diner mutters to his companion, "snap the jaw, lock the law, block the flaw in the system," to which she fires back, "system? You mean the circus where the clowns charge admission to watch the audience bleed?"

A chalkboard announces tonight's attraction: a musical adaptation of *Wrecks Around Nantucket* by Arthur H. Gardner, that 1915 revision of the 1877 chronicle cataloging over seven hundred vessels claimed by the island's shoals, and tonight the spotlight falls on January 4, 1813, when the English ship *Queen*—a prize of the American

privateer *General Armstrong* under John Barnard—broke in two and came ashore at Nobadeer Beach, her cargo of porter, sauerkraut, cheese, hams, duck cloth, hats, pig iron, boiler guns, grindstones, and costly goods strewn from Siasconset to Miacomet Pond. The privateer had already stripped watches and jewelry worth $50,000–$60,000 before the prize master, Nantucket-born Joel West, lost her to weather; islanders descended with carts and lanterns, helping themselves freely, hiding what they took, leaving agents to chase ghosts through lawsuits that pitted neighbor against neighbor long after the bodies washed ashore and an Owyhee diver worked the summer surf with capstan and slings.

Gideon yawns, which takes approximately forty seconds and resembles continental drift, prompting the hostess to lean in and hiss, “drift? You drift like a Cadillac with rusted fins through a sea of melted watches, and your sloth’s the only one still trying to tell time with a sundial made of salt.”

We are seated beside the lobster tank. The overture begins with a clarinet that sounds as though it has misplaced its moral center, warbling like a seasick siren until the conductor snaps, “crack the reed, bleed the need, feed the greed for silence,” to which the clarinetist retorts, “silence? Silence is a telephone that only rings when the moon is embarrassed, and you’re

standing there looking like a masterpiece painted by a blind man in a hurricane."

The soup arrives before the first lyric, steaming with historical intent. A fisherman in a sweater stands on a chair and launches into patter:
"I am the very model of a nautical catastrophe,
With ballast made of guilt and zoning laws in agony,
Porter flowing free, sauerkraut in glee,
Hats afloat where regulations flee!
I've studied charts of shoals and moral shoals as well,
And every wreck's a tale that ends in legal hell!"

Diners attempt conversation but discover sentences have become rigging; nouns smell faintly of brine. Someone says “Nantucket” and the word itself produces a gust of wind that rattles forks, leading a portly gentleman at the next table to grumble, “rattle the bone, tone the drone, own the throne of nonsense,” and his wife sighs back, “nonsense? Nonsense is a duck that knits sweaters instead of quacks, pass the butter before it stages its own coup.”

Gideon sleeps through all of it, chin resting on my collarbone, claws gently kneading my shoulder in a motion that suggests either affection or slow geological pressure, though when a waiter pauses to stare and asks,

“participate? Does the beast ever participate?” I answer, “participate? He participates in dreams where haste is considered vulgar, a faux pas in the slow-motion opera of leaves.”

Performers dressed as buoys roll between tables chanting tones halfway between monastery and foghorn, their chorus swelling into a brisk round about navigation warnings ignored by bureaucracy. A retired electrician is transformed into a lighthouse by holding a flashlight and existential dread, muttering, “beam the light, fight the night, sight the fright in sailors who steer by hope alone, hope? Hope is a Cadillac with rusted fins sailing through a sea of melted watches.”

The sloth snores. No one questions the legality of bringing a rainforest mammal into a seafood establishment; theater has already suspended reality's jurisdiction, as evidenced when a stagehand whispers, "union? Is the sloth union?" and the director snaps back, "union? If he joins we'll pay overtime for snoring in four-four time."

Without warning, the accordionist produces a parchment scroll and announces January 4, 1813, with the solemnity of mildew spreading across a ledger. A narrator begins: "A vessel broken in two came ashore at Nobadeer..." But immediately the catastrophe metastasizes into a musical number titled Inventory of

Opportunism in E Minor, the ensemble bursting into gleeful patter while townspeople wheel shopping carts labeled *Temporary Custody* and *Souvenir Pending Litigation.* They sing about the strewn cargo while accusing one another of theft in perfect counterpoint, accusations flying like gulls.

Waiters distribute porter to the audience for authenticity, one spilling a drop near Gideon and quipping, "thirsty? Your friend thirsty?" to which I reply, "thirsty? Only for repose; liquor would just speed up his elegant inertia."

Gideon continues sleeping, head tilted back now, mouth open in serene

indifference to human opportunism across centuries, even as a chorus member leans over and confides, "loot? In real life they hid the loot in attics—makes you wonder what's buried in your grandma's hope chest," and the diner chuckles, "hope? Mine's stuffed with dashed dreams and moth-eaten lace."

A dancer portraying a privateer leaps across the dining room stealing imaginary watches while a baritone sings entirely in conditional tense—"would have yielded, might have secured, could have produced"—his voice rising in satirical rush. Agents in oversized coats search diners for missing pig iron beneath chairs. No one objects because civilization is merely organized scavenging with

receipts, as one agent grunts, “found? Found anything?” and another replies, “crumbs and dignity—both lost at sea.”

The sloth twitches once—possibly dreaming of leaves, possibly of legal liability waivers, which reminds me of the time Gideon “signed” one by drooling on it, leading the vet to say, “binding? That’s as binding as a promise from fog.”

Lawsuits become choreography. Couples waltz while exchanging affidavits, their steps syncing to a brisk legal dance of blame and denial. A trio representing communal suspicion sings a round in which each voice claims innocence while pocketing

props. The narrator pauses to argue that shipwreck stories disguise a deeper wreck: social cohesion dissolving under the solvent of unattended goods. The sea provides cargo; humans supply entropy. Agents for the privateer's captain arrived but recovered little; suits dragged on among islanders themselves, inspiring a bystander to whisper, "dance? Litigation as dance? Next they'll choreograph taxes," and she retorts, "taxes? They already have—it's called the two-step deduction."

I nod solemnly. Gideon drools slightly onto my sleeve, prompting a waitress to offer a napkin and muse, "idea? He's got the right idea—sleep through the storm," and I agree,

“storm? But waking to leftovers is his quiet plot twist.”

A lobster is elevated to tragic protagonist, its interior monologue sung with operatic gravitas: resentment toward butter, skepticism about destiny, claws as metaphors for intimacy and violence. The audience laughs too loudly because metaphysics disguised as seafood is uncomfortable, one patron snorting, “philosopher? A lobster philosopher? Mine just gripes about the rubber bands.”

Gideon remains unconscious, which I begin to suspect is not apathy but wisdom, especially when compared to the acrobat portraying the historical diver—an Owyhee man hired that

summer—who descends beneath tables to retrieve symbolic artifacts hoisted via a rotating coat-rack capstan. He sings only one line:
"I go where you cannot breathe."
For a moment the room stills. Even the kitchen seems to pause.

The sloth does not stir, though if he did he'd likely say nothing, unlike the narrator in a rain slicker who proposes that humans convert disaster into narrative because raw chaos is nutritionally insufficient. A wreck without story is loss; a wreck with song becomes heritage, tourism, grant funding. Musicals are rehearsals for catastrophe with jazz hands. Gardner's chronicle—over seven hundred wrecks—turns peril into

pages preserved as souvenirs, leading the slickered figure to quip, “chaos? Chaos is just plot without a playwright,” and a heckler calls back, “playwright? Or a playwright without a plot—same blackout.”

No one applauds because everyone is chewing, which is a form of applause if mastication is considered percussion. Gideon’s breathing becomes synchronized with the rhythm section, as if even in slumber he’s conducting the absurdity.

Thunder is produced by oven doors, lightning by camera flashes, wind by industrial fans. Performers stagger between tables singing about masts snapping and chowder cooling, their finale a whirlwind of elemental

disaster. A baritone collapses onto tourists from Ohio, who continue buttering rolls with admirable composure, one saying mildly, "theater? If this is theater, I'll take my drama with extra yeast."

At the height of the storm the music stops. Silence expands. One hears only the aquarium pump... forks... breathing... the faint snore of a tropical mammal, which sounds suspiciously like a critique of the whole affair.

The cast distributes souvenirs labeled *Recovered from the Queen*—napkins, spoons, condiment packets—inviting us to keep them. The narrator asks whether possession transforms salvage into theft or memory into heritage.

No answer comes, but a cast member murmurs, “heritage? It’s just theft with a family tree.”

One actor, a wiry tenor with the earnest mustache of someone who has read too much Melville, approaches our table. He bows with theatrical gravity and extends a small wooden box containing a single, glistening wedge of what he declares to be “authentic shipwreck cheese—aged in brine and moral compromise.”
I wave it off politely. “Thank you, but I’ll pass. The narrative weight is already sufficient.”

Gideon, who has spent the entire evening approximating a living scarf, chooses this precise moment to stir.

His eyelids part with the slow reluctance of tectonic plates separating. One languid claw extends, hooks the cheese wedge with surprising precision, and draws it toward his mouth. He chews once—deliberately, obscenely slowly—while maintaining direct eye contact with the actor, as though critiquing the vintage.

The actor blinks, delighted. "Even the sloth recognizes historical provenance!"

I lean down toward Gideon's ear-fur. "You're awake. Miracles do happen."

Gideon swallows, tilts his head maybe three degrees—enough to register acknowledgment—and speaks in the

softest, slowest baritone imaginable, each word spaced like islands in fog.

"The tenor's mustache... curls like overcooked linguine left in the rain. Artistic choice or just poor barber hygiene?"

I snort quietly. "You noticed that? I thought you were dreaming of canopy leaves."

"Dreaming," he murmurs, "is multitasking for the fatigued. The mezzo in the buoy costume... her sequins catch the light like oil slicks on a parking lot after a storm. Pretty. Also faintly tragic. Like trying to sparkle while bobbing in bureaucracy."

The woman in the ethical cable-knit sweater is already rising from two tables over, fork raised like a tiny trident, launching into her manifesto. “Excuse me, but this entire spectacle is problematic—”

Gideon rotates his head ninety degrees toward her with glacial inevitability and extends the empty claw, offering the ghost of the cheese.

She freezes. “Is that... dairy? I’m lactose intolerant. Severely. And this smells like it remembers something... legal. I can’t—I won’t be complicit in fermented litigation.” She backs away, purse clutched like a life preserver. “This is allergen colonialism!” The door thuds shut behind her.

Gideon tucks his head back under my chin but doesn't quite close his eyes this time. "She moved fast," he observes. "For someone so committed to slowness in all other matters."

I stroke the fur along his neck. "You just ended an ideological tirade with half a cheese wedge. That's performance art."

"Performance," he echoes. "The soup was good. Clam chowder. Thick. Creamy. Smelled like low tide and butter and someone's grandmother's regrets. I approve. Though chewing it would require more effort than I currently possess."

"You didn't even taste it."

“I tasted the steam. Steam counts when you’re conserving calories for existential commentary.”
A waiter passes with a tray of fresh rolls. Gideon’s nostrils flare, almost imperceptibly. “The bread here... smells honest. Yeasty. Like it remembers being wheat. Unlike most bread, which has forgotten everything except how to be disappointed.”

I tear off a small piece and hold it near his mouth. He considers it, then takes the tiniest nibble. “Acceptable,” he decides. “Soft. Not aggressive. The atmosphere in this place is... damp. Warm. Like a greenhouse for actors and chowder. Everyone’s sweating ambition. You can smell it mixing with the garlic butter.”

He pauses, exhales a breath that lasts longer than most people's sentences. "Speaking of exhaustion... the fibromyalgia has been loud lately. Like background radiation, only it stings the joints instead of the thyroid. The chronic fatigue is worse. It's not tiredness. It's gravity turned personal. Every movement feels like wading through wet cement that's also judgmental."

I nod, keeping my voice low. "The new supplement helping at all?"

"Vitamin D with K2 and magnesium malate. The bottle says 'energy support.' I say 'polite suggestion to the mitochondria.' So far it's... whispering. Not shouting. But

whispering is better than silence. Yesterday I managed to climb one branch higher in the enclosure before deciding the view was sufficient. Progress."

"You're basically a monk of minimalism."

"Monks get robes. I get a tiny embroidered vest. We're in the same business: renunciation with branding."

The tenor circles back, pocketing the empty cheese box. "The sloth has spoken," he says to me, then glances at Gideon. "You're stealing the show, friend."

Gideon regards him with half-lidded benevolence. “Your mustache... still looks like linguine. But the effort is admirable. Effort counts when the body is conspiring against you.”

The actor laughs, startled. “Fair. I’ll take it.”
He moves on. Gideon settles deeper against my collarbone. “The performers are earnest,” he murmurs.

“That’s the best and worst thing about them. Earnestness is exhausting. I admire it from a distance. Like admiring lightning while staying indoors.”

I rest my hand on his back, feeling the slow rise and fall.

Outside Bangor, the Penobscot flows on, unconcerned with wrecks past or impending. Another ship will break eventually. Another musical will try to make sense of it. Gideon and I will likely miss both, wrapped in the quiet certainty that urgency is optional, that salvage and story are often the same act with different lighting, and that sometimes the most coherent commentary is delivered in a whisper between bites of pilfered cheese.
Gideon's eyes drift shut again. His breathing slows.

"Wake me," he murmurs, barely audible, "when the next ship breaks."

Inventory of Opportunism: Historical Wrecks and Scholarly Rants

Archival Introduction

The following text is derived from a 19th-century manuscript held by the Bibliothèques de l'École normale supérieure (ENS) in Paris. Cataloged from the 1853–1854 academic year, the document contains the handwritten lecture notes of Henri Joseph Guillaume Patin (1793–1876), a distinguished Professor of the Faculty of Letters.

In this specific excerpt from Volume 2 of his Cours de poésie latine, Professor Patin engages in a meticulous philological dissection of the Ciris, a minor Latin epic historically, though dubiously, attributed to the youth of Virgil. Patin connects the philosophical underpinnings of the Ciris to Virgil's own documented dalliance with Epicureanism. To support this thesis, Patin cites the Catalepton (specifically Poem 5), wherein a young Virgil formally bids

farewell to the Muses to go study under the Epicurean philosopher Siro. Finally, Patin identifies a direct imitative link between the opening of the Ciris and Catullus's Poem 65. What follows is a recently unearthed, verbatim transcript of Professor Patin delivering this exact lecture to his students, providing a startling window into the pedagogical atmosphere of the era.

Transcript: Lecture on the Ciris, Autumn Term, 1853.

[Professor Patin strides to the lectern. He pauses to adjust a monocle that does not exist, inhales a perilous, geological volume of snuff from a silver tortoise-shell tin, sneezes violently onto the ledger of the student in the front row, and recovers by taking a copious, unbothered pull from a magnum of Bordeaux he has produced from his waistcoat.]

"Let us begin by acknowledging that the exegesis of first-century BCE Roman poetry is an enterprise enjoyed primarily by those who find staring at beige corduroy too

overstimulating. I, for my manifold sins, have been tasked with dragging you by the lapels into the labyrinth of the Ciris, and frankly, the entire megillah gives me a throbbing neuralgia just south of the right temple. Close your mouths; you are catching flies, and the ambient idiocy in this room is freezing my kneecaps."

[He elegantly inserts a Sobranie cigarette into a tortoiseshell holder roughly the length of a javelin, strikes a match on the mahogany podium, and casually descends the steps to seat himself directly upon the lap of a terrified, trembling sophomore. Patin crosses his legs comfortably, using the boy's shoulder as an armrest.]

"Now, the cat who scratched out this particular manuscript was swinging to a strictly Epicurean beat. Ergo, the scholarly squares deduce, it must be the work of young Publius Vergilius Maro. The V-Man himself. To prove this agonizingly pedantic point, let us drop the needle on a golden oldie from the Catalepton, Poem 5, wherein our pastoral boy formally evicts his artistic inspirations."

[Patin rolls his eyes so far back into his skull he appears momentarily possessed, contorting his features into a mask of such profound, lemon-sucking disgust that the sophomore whose lap he is occupying whimpers audibly. Patin flicks his ash indiscriminately into the boy's inkwell.]

"Listen to the groove of the Latin. 'Nos ad beatos vela mittimus portus...' Let me strip away the fustian for the rubes in the cheap seats. Translating this through the lens of modern existential fatigue, Virgil is laying down a heavy, heavy manifesto:
'Dig this, my sweet, harmonious kittens: Papa is hoisting the jib. We are making tracks for the most righteous, velvet-lined harbor of the intellect. I am charting a course to get hip to the supreme doctrines of Big Daddy Syron, and we are going to liberate our mortal coil from this atrocious, ulcer-inducing hassle you call a career.'

[Patin abruptly stands up, spilling a dollop of Bordeaux onto the sophomore's cravat, and begins pacing the center aisle, swatting at the air with his cigarette holder as if surrounded by invisible, irritating gnats.]

'Therefore,' Virgil continues, 'take a powder, Muses! Scram! Hit the bricks! You, too, the whole swingin' sisterhood of the scroll— beat it!'

But then! The classic freelancer's remorse! He peers over the precipice of actual employment and immediately hedges his bets!
'Although... let us be brutally, painfully frank for a microsecond. You were a solid kick in the head. You were a gas. Therefore, do not, under any circumstances, lose my address. Slide by the pad every now and again to gaze upon my manuscripts, but do so with the utmost modesty, strictly on the Q.T., because I am attempting to cultivate an air of aloof philosophical detachment, which is frightfully difficult to maintain when one has a gaggle of ethereal jazz-birds squawking dactylic rhythms in the foyer.'"

[Patin pauses to drink directly from the bottle of Bordeaux, wiping his mouth with the back of a lace-cuffed hand. He sneers at the chalkboard.]

"This Syron he mentions, naturally, is an Epicurean philosopher. Which is to say, Siro

was a man who likely sat around in a bespoke toga complaining about the ambient temperature of his olives while fundamentally refusing to participate in basic civic duties. A lifestyle I not only entirely endorse but am actively attempting to patent. But I am not finished! The grift goes deeper!"

[He jabs the long cigarette holder aggressively toward the back row, nearly blinding a divinity student.]

"Observe the first line of the Ciris. It is an absolute, brazen, daylight stick-up job of Catullus's Poem 65! 'Etsi me assiduo confectum cura dolore / Sevocat a doctis, Hortale, virginibus.'

Which translates, for those of you who spent your preparatory years eating paste, to:
'Even though I am thoroughly puréed by the unrelenting bludgeon of constant sorrow, Hortalus, you old horse thief, it drags me away from the learned virgins.'

[Patin shudders violently, as if a spectral goose has walked over his grave, jams another

aggressive pinch of snuff up his left nostril, and glares at the lecture hall with absolute contempt.]

"The grand cosmic joke, my agonizingly dull pupils, is that the Roman literary scene is nothing but new cats endlessly sampling the old grooves. One poet claims he is too depressed to hang out with the Muses; another claims he is too busy studying the molecular structure of the universe to hang out with the Muses. The Muses, presumably, are sitting in a celestial dive bar, utterly relieved to be rid of the lot of them.

Western literature is built upon a bedrock of monumental flakes making highly eloquent excuses to avoid doing actual work. I find the historical precedent completely validating. Class is dismissed. If anyone needs me, I shall be in my chambers, drinking heavily and staring at a wall until I achieve a state of pure, untroubled apathy."

RAPID ASSESSMENT, ZERO SENTIMENT.

By D&C Yellow

The air in the Tree Streets arranged itself into the rigid, liturgical corners of a high-definition isolation, falling across the linoleum that had absorbed thirty years of small disasters until you could almost believe the floor was a topographic map of your own nervous breakdown. You sit at the kitchen table with a chipped mug that *says Souvenir of the 1911 Great Fire*, which is a joke because nothing survived that heat except the specific fear of being caught in a freshet, a wet-timber panic that stayed in the marrow like the low-frequency drone of the river digesting the continental shelf.

You listen.

If the universe is a closed, dynamic ecosystem of disappointment, does the Fine Structure Constant—that dimensionless alpha approximately equal to 1/137—act as the ultimate marked disruptor in the unmarked void of physics, or is it merely a clerical error in the hymn sung by a drunk pastor, a sign that the electromagnetic coupling of our reality was never meant to be taken seriously by anyone other than a Lombard-lumberjack stripping thirty layers of cobalt haze from the sky? The thought arrives fully formed, as if labeled by someone else's hand. You do not remember requesting it.

The hum continues.

That river resonance is an unassailable frequency, a private 432 Hz where sawdust meets digital noise, and you find yourself labeling the firing patterns of the electrodes without meaning to, marking the systematic harvesting of the collective unconscious while

leaving unmarked the labor of the technicians who calibrated the needles. You are Patient Zero, known in the waking world as One Size.

You pause.

The realization arrives slowly: the hum is not the refrigerator but the mechanical respiration of a system too exhausted to be fragile. Which is nonsense, because the last time you heard that particular rattle you were gripping the cracked steering wheel of a red 1988 Mitsubishi Mirage, the dashboard trembling with insect persistence. Memory calibrates itself around sound.

As you navigate the sodium-lit industrial periphery, you see them—the ghosts of contract children of agrarian shame—wandering in droves across the streets with valises full of silk cravats and silk-topped hats, their labor auctioned off for pennies in a Cellar of Pain where the difference between a foster home and a workhouse is just a line of

green cursor-blink in a Bakelite housing. Infrastructure repeats cruelty. Systems scale it.

The car is a closed ecosystem of disappointment, its 1.2-liter engine a tautology of motion that refuses to participate in the patriarchal narrative of the geared ascent, and the check-engine light is your only guiding star. You idle the engine because turning it off would feel like a lie, and lies here have a way of sinking into the river and resurfacing decades later as cannon, which was the only way to document a world that was falling apart in slow motion.

Movement spreads along networks.

That is how the shortage began.

The tariffs arrived like a moral thunderclap no one had budgeted for. Supply chains seized. Warehouses went silent. Somewhere, spreadsheets turned the color of dried blood.

Foreign child labor—once an invisible hydraulic pressure holding the consumer universe together—stopped moving, and the void it left behind had mass. Shelves emptied. Charging cables vanished. The smallest conveniences revealed themselves as structural beams.

Management was instructed to compensate.

So management began begging.

Outside a convenience store glowing with fluorescent indifference, a former regional operations supervisor—tie missing, beard salt-streaked, eyes vibrating with nutritional deficit—approached a teenager sitting on an overturned milk crate scrolling through a cracked phone.

"Hey," the manager said, voice hoarse with rehearsed professionalism, "you got any work? I can... I can do tasks. For food."

The teen didn't look up at first.

Then he did.

He scanned the man the way inventory software scans a barcode—rapid assessment, zero sentiment.

"Why don't you hobos make me some phone chargers," the kid said finally, shrugging. "I'll see what I have for ramen."

The sentence landed with the authority of a performance review.

The manager nodded immediately.

"Yes. Yes. Output. That makes sense. Deliverables."

He backed away, already calculating throughput against caloric probability.

The Mirage idled nearby like a patient animal.

You watch him go.

You understand, suddenly, that hierarchy has inverted. Labor now assigns management tasks. Hunger is the new KPI.

You finally set down the thermal printer. Only the handle feels warm in your palm, a heat like the outgassing scent of industrial pine from two hundred fresh zines whose pages are a GMO-free sgraffito of entropy and memory. The door of the car flings open, admitting a procession of Middle Managers from Space, their skin a palimpsest of failed performance reviews, each one carrying a leather-bound valise of allegiances no longer operational. One Size hands them pancakes like citations, each bearing a fragment of the Necrosign—a liturgy broken into chewable units—while the managers offer their assessment of the ongoing calamity.

“The structure holds,” intones a former regional supervisor, his voice a syncopated rush of bureaucratic sand-grit, “but the output is strictly mind over madder, a totalizing metaphysical erasure where the only truth is the transaction made in the fog.”

You nod.

Because you have seen the fog.

It lives in back rooms now.

In a storage space behind a pawn shop, lit by a single oscillating bulb, the same half-starved manager stands before a cracked mirror propped against a crate of obsolete routers. His collar is gray with sweat. A soldering iron trembles in his hand like a divining rod searching for dignity in scrap.

On the table: stripped copper wire, salvaged USB heads, insulation scavenged from appliance cords, plastic housings pried open

with a screwdriver that still bears the logo of a company that no longer exists.

He barks into the mirror.

"You slow down, you don't eat!"

The reflection barks back.

"You hear me? Throughput is survival. Metrics are calories."

He twists two wires together with frantic precision, breath shallow, teeth clenched. The motion has become automatic, a choreography learned in some ancestral factory that predates his birth. Management training modules never covered this scenario: when the abstraction collapses and the manager becomes the labor unit.

He inspects the cord.

Not good enough.

Again.

"You want to starve?" he shouts. "You want to be replaced?"

Replaced by what is unclear. There is nothing left downstream. The market has become a closed ecosystem of demand feeding on itself, a snake swallowing the ghost of its own tail.

Behind him, cardboard boxes filled with finished charger cords accumulate like offerings in a temple to throughput. No branding. No certification. Just objects—proof that effort occurred.

The mirror fractures his face into multiple supervisors.

Each one disappointed.

Each one hungry.

“You slow down,” he whispers now, voice cracking into something almost tender, “you don’t eat.”

And for a moment he cannot tell whether the threat is motivation or prophecy.

Somewhere, a shooting star completes its burning.

The Mirage settles into a rhythmic crawl toward the end of Maple Street.

The engine lets out a familiar, tiny, and profoundly polite sigh from behind the plastic dashboard, a sound like a misplaced comma in a sentence that refuses to end.

HOBO COLLEGE AT AUTHORITY 087

A detonated symposium in several tableaux, with marginalia, combustion diagrams, edible folklore, and interstellar jungle argot

By Nevin Trials

TABLEAU I · Arrival

The refrigerator box had achieved municipal significance by dusk.

Cardboard ribs, swollen from old winters, caught lantern light in amber cathedral corridors for modest saints. Outside, Bangor's Tree Streets stood in liturgical frost; freight horn moaned prophecy down by the river.

Ken—Civic Listener, Neighboring Authority 087—sealed the door flap with priestly tape. Tonight the box was office and jungle: communal camp for itinerant administrators warming hands before the next catch-out.

A tremor in the extension cord. Ionization in the air.
The flap lifted. The first Hobo Office Manager from Space entered sideways, blazer grown from metallic moss, briefcase pulsing with bioluminescent spreadsheets (currency: calories, trust, favors).
Behind him: Regional Efficiency Coordinators of Orion, Assistant Vice Presidents of Throughput from Perseus Arm, a Compliance Auditor annotated in obsolete alphabets. They moved like seasoned travelers following cosmic freight routes.
They removed hats. One bowed.

"Affirmative node confirmed. We request jungle privileges and temporary berth before the next flyer through sector dawn."

Ken nodded.
"Coffee?"

TABLEAU II · Klupskies

[MARGINALIA: KLUPSKIES — Edible Folklore]

2 lbs ground beef (or 1.8 lbs vrell) • 1 cup memory-substrate breadcrumbs • ½ cup preserved tears (diced onion) • 2 eggs • 3 cloves garlic • salt, pepper, paprika.

Form small patties of institutional hope. Fry until ancestral smoke. Serve on paper if collapsing; porcelain if pretending.

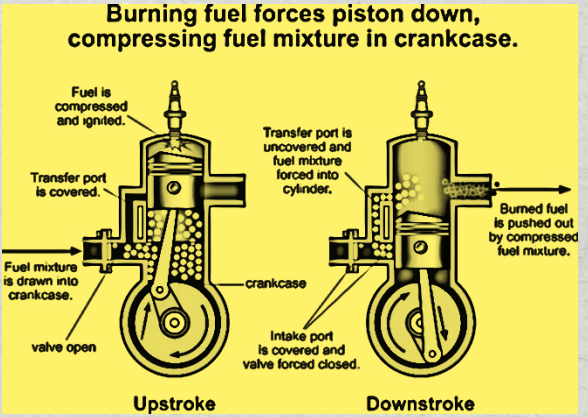
Klupskies hissed from a dented skillet on questionable current. Managers ate with reverence. Hunger is the universal KPI.

Talk turned to fools: sacred, court, cosmic, bureaucratic, crumb-boss. The Fool as system overflow. In softer universes ($\alpha = 1/142$) more fools per capita, easier transit between worlds. Ours (1/137) runs hot and tight—fewer fools, more brittleness.

A Tau Ceti manager: "We promote fools immediately. Only they find new paths; the competent guard empty yards."

TABLEAU III · Hotshot Configuration

A diagram unfolded in the air, unbidden.


Burning fuel forces piston down, compressing fuel mixture in crankcase.
Fuel is compressed and ignited.
Transfer port is covered.
Fuel mixture is drawn into crankcase.
valve open
crankcase
Transfer port is uncovered and fuel mixture forced into cylinder.
Burned fuel is pushed out by compressed fuel mixture.
Intake port is covered and valve forced closed.
Upstroke
Downstroke

Stutterstuck

[COMBUSTION DIAGRAM — HOTSHOT]

Cylinder: compression chamber • Piston: moral vector • Boiler: hope reservoir • Brake: institutional hesitation.

Lightning between brass spheres DESPAIR and MOTIVE FORCE. Chalkboard equation:

$$E = \Delta S \times (\text{fool density}) \times \alpha$$

A manager traced the piston. “Morale is combustion. This is compression before launch. Ignition requires fools.”

Ken considered a new tab for SUMMA PRACTICA: INTERDIMENSIONAL MECHANICS.

TABLEAU IV · Archival Logs

Old Hobo News torn into strips (obits burn hottest), soaked, compressed in soup cans under despair, dried near cardboard walls, lit with intention. Knowledge → thermal survival at 40% efficiency. Remainder: ghost.

A manager rolled pulp like sacred clay. “Archival combustion,” he whispered. ”We burn obsolete tax codes for the same purpose.”

Flame caught. Faces lit—galactic supply-chain supervisors warmed by bureaucratic ghosts and chalked freight schedules.

The singing manager leapt up. Arms wide. French chanson—joyful, melancholic, defiant. The copier paused mid-scan. Even Bangor slowed, unsure if it had entered opera.
TABLEAU V · Departure

Briefcases hummed. A doorway re-aligned in the cardboard wall.

"It's time. Hotshot through dawn corridor." The singer gripped Ken's shoulders. "You are infrastructure. A good crumb boss of realities."

They stepped through.
Gone.
Only fire remained. And on Ken's forehead, unnoticed, a glowing gold star sticker.

EPILOGUE · Morning

Frost traced seams like circuitry. Ken repainted the sign:

KEN

CIVIC LISTENER
NEIGHBORING AUTHORITY 087

RATES NEGOTIABLE. COFFEE AVAILABLE.

HOBO COLLEGE — OPEN SESSIONS
SAFE JUNGLE. NO BULLS.

A passerby hesitated. Entered.

Alignment: coffee steam, photocopied law, mythological fools, burned newspapers, cosmic managers, one human sitting long enough for reality to rotate ninety degrees before the next freight of destiny approaches.

[FINAL MARGINALIA — SUMMA PRACTICA]

Interdimensional Labor Exchange: ACTIVE
Fools preferred. Competence negotiable. Bring moss if formal.
Next session: when the cardboard again achieves municipal significance.

— Authority 087, electrical storm signature

END

SYLLABUS ERRATICA: A Tychean Inventory of Fixed Stars and Falling Ratios

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